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The Three Weavers

A FAIRY TALE FOR FATHERS
AND MOTHERS AS WELL AS
FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS

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THE THREE WEAVERS

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AND MOTHERS AS WELL AS
FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS

BY

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

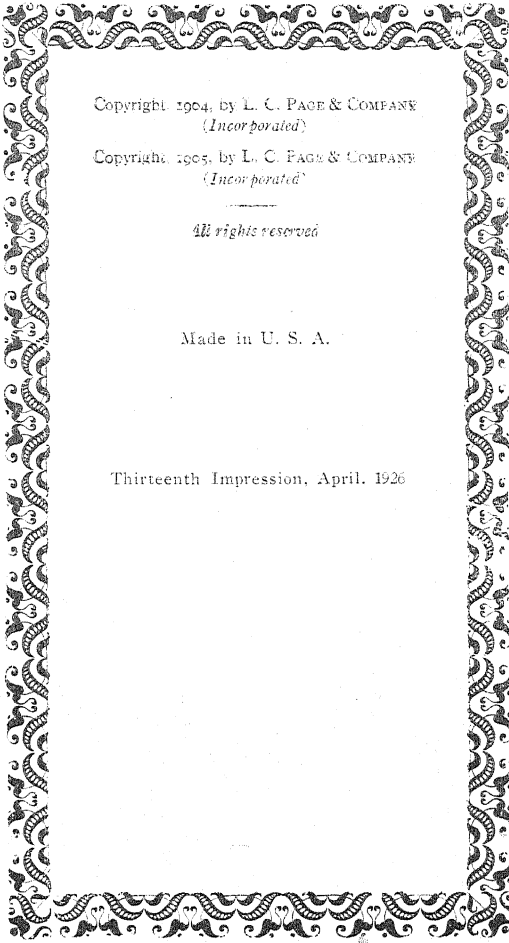
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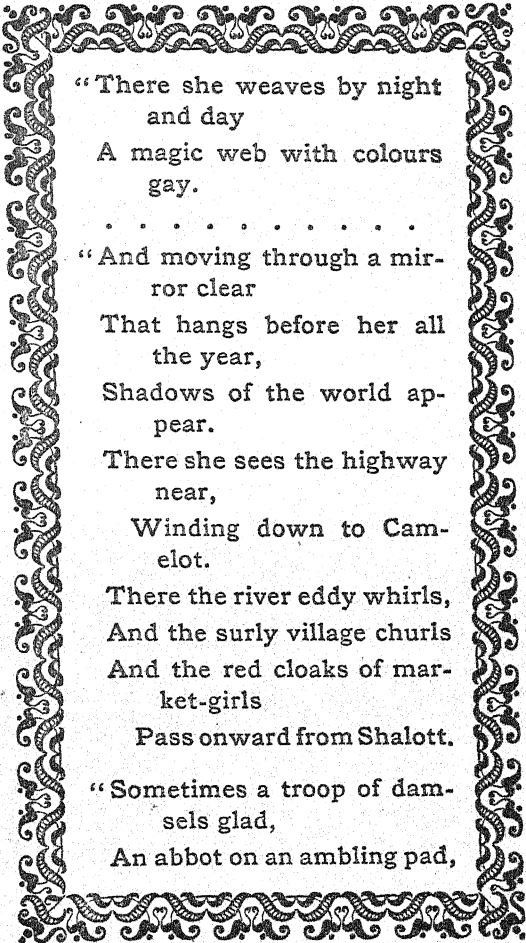
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“There she weaves by night
and day
A magic web with colours
gay.

.
“And moving through a mir-
ror clear

That hangs before her all
the year,
Shadows of the world ap-
pear.

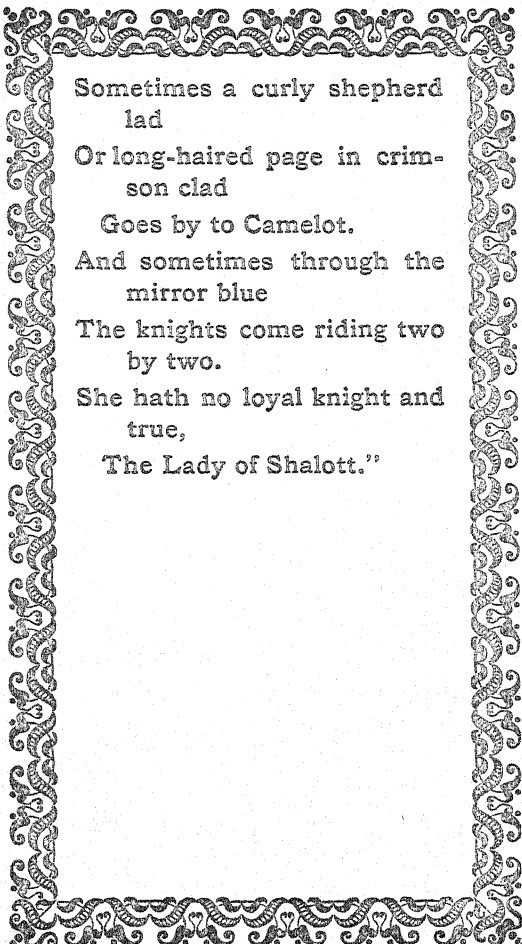
There she sees the highway
near,
Winding down to Cam-
elot.

There the river eddy whirls,
And the surly village churls
And the red cloaks of mar-
ket-girls

Pass onward from Shalott.

“Sometimes a troop of dam-
sels glad,

An abbot on an ambling pad,



Sometimes a curly shepherd
lad

Or long-haired page in crim-
son clad

Goes by to Camelot.

And sometimes through the
mirror blue

The knights come riding two
by two.

She hath no loyal knight and
true,

The Lady of Shalott."

ONCE upon a time
 (the same time
 that the Lady of
 Shalott wove her magic
 web, and near the four
 gray towers from which
 she watched the road
 running down to Came-
 lot) there lived three
 weavers. Their houses
 stood side by side, and
 such had been their equal

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then the web by the inches and ells of his carefully notched yardstick.

Now to each weaver was born a daughter, all on the same day, and they named them Hertha, Huberta, and Hildegarde. On the night after the christening, as the three men sat smoking their pipes on the same stoop, the father of Hertha said, 'Do not think me puffed up with unseemly pride, good neighbours, but wonderful fortune hath



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befallen me and mine this day. Clotho, the good fairy of all the weavers, was present at my Hertha's christening, and left beside her cradle a gift: a tiny loom that from beam to shuttle is of purest gold. And she whispered to me in passing, 'Good fortune, Herthold. It is written in the stars that a royal prince shall seek to wed thy child.'

But Herthold's news caused no astonishment to his neighbours. What had happened under the

The Three Weavers

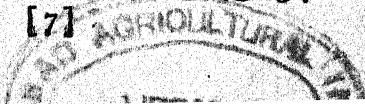
roof of one had happened under the roofs of all, and the same good fortune was written in the stars for each, and the same gift had been left by each child's cradle. So the three friends rejoiced together, and boasted jestingly among themselves of the three kings' sons who should some day sit down at their tables.

But presently Hildgardmar, the father of Hildegarde, said, 'But there may be a slip twixt cup and lip. Mayhap our

The Three Weavers

daughters cannot fulfil the required condition.'

At that they looked grave for a moment, for Clotho had added in passing, 'One thing is necessary. She must weave upon this loom I leave a royal mantle for the prince's wearing. It must be ample and fair to look upon, rich cloth of gold, of princely size and texture. Many will come to claim it, but if it is woven rightly the destined prince alone can wear it, and him it will fit in all fault-





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lessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon. But if it should not be ample and fine, meet for royal wearing, the prince will not deign to don it, and the maiden's heart shall break, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.'

'Oh, well,' said Herthold, when the three had smoked in silence a little space. 'I'll guard against that. I shall hide all knowledge of the magic loom from my daughter until she be grown. Then,



The Three Weavers

under mine own eye, by mine own measurements that I always use, shall she weave the goodly garment. In the meantime she shall learn all the arts which become a princess to know — broi-dery and fair needlework, and songs upon a lute. But of the weaving she shall know naught until she be grown. That I am determined upon. 'Tis sorry work her childish hands would make of it, if left to throw the shuttle at a maiden's fickle fancy.'



The Three Weavers

But Hubert shook his head. 'Why stew about a trifle!' he exclaimed. 'Forsooth, on such a tiny loom no web of any kind can well be woven. 'Tis but a toy that Clotho left the child to play with, and she shall weave her dreams and fancies on it at her own sweet will. I shall not interfere. What's written in the stars is written, and naught that I can do will change it. Away, friend Hildgardmar, with thy forebodings!'

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Hildgardmar said nothing in reply, but he thought much. He followed the example of the others, and early and late might have been heard the pounding of the three looms, for there was need to work harder than ever now, that the little maidens might have teachers for all the arts becoming a princess—broidery and fair needlework and songs upon the lute.

While the looms pounded in the dwellings the little maidens

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grew apace. They played together in the same garden and learned from the same skilled teachers their daily lessons, and in their fondness for each other were as three sisters.

One day Huberta said to the others, 'Come with me and I will show you a beautiful toy that Clotho left me at my christening. My father says she gave one to each of us, and that it is written in the stars that we are each to wed a prince if we can



The Three Weavers

weave for him an ample cloak of cloth of gold. Already I have begun to weave mine.'

All silently, for fear of watchful eyes and forbidding voices, they stole into an inner room, and she showed them the loom of gold. But now no longer was it the tiny toy that had been left beside her cradle. It had grown with her growth. For every inch that had been added to her stature an inch had been added to the loom's. The warp

The Three Weavers

was Clotho's gift, all thread of gold, and it, too, grew with the maiden's growth; but the thread the shuttle carried was of her own spinning—rainbow hued and rose-coloured, from the airy dream-fleece of her own sweet fancies.

'See,' she whispered, 'I have begun the mantle for my prince's wearing.' Seizing the shuttle as she had seen her father do so many times she crossed the golden warp with the woof-thread of a rosy

The Three Weathers

day-dream. Hertha and Hildegarde looked on in silent envy, not so much for the loom as for the mirror which hung beside it, wherein, as in the Lady of Shalott's, moved the shadows of the world. The same pictures that flitted across hers, flitted across Huberta's.

‘See!’ she cried again, pointing to the mirror, ‘That curly shepherd lad! Does he not look like a prince as he strides by with his head high, and his blue eyes smiling upon

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all the world? He carries his crook like a royal sceptre, forsooth. Well you may believe I am always at my mirror both at sunrise and sunset to see him pass gaily by.'

'Yon long-haired page in crimson clad is more to my liking,' said Hertha, timidly. 'Methinks he has a noble mien, as of one brought up in palaces. I wonder why my father has never said aught to me of Clotho's gift. I, too, should be at

The Three Weavers

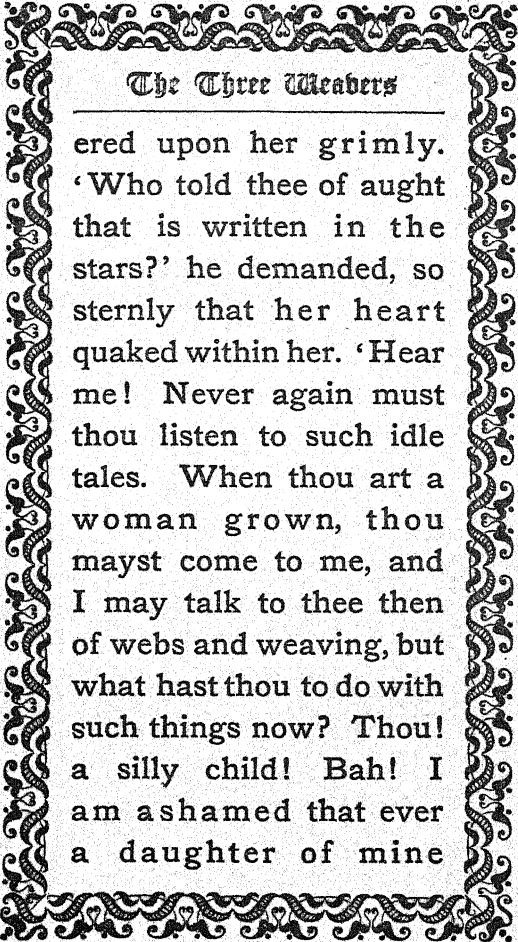
my weaving, for I am as old as thou, Huberta.'

'And I also,' added Hildegarde.

'Ask him,' quoth Huberta. 'Mayhap he hath forgot.'

So, when Hertha reached home, she went to her father Herthold, and said, timidly, with downcast eyes and blushes, 'Father—where is my loom, like Huberta's? I, too, would be weaving as it is written in the stars.'

But Herthold glow-



The Three Weavers

ered upon her grimly. 'Who told thee of aught that is written in the stars?' he demanded, so sternly that her heart quaked within her. 'Hear me! Never again must thou listen to such idle tales. When thou art a woman grown, thou mayst come to me, and I may talk to thee then of webs and weaving, but what hast thou to do with such things now? Thou! a silly child! Bah! I am ashamed that ever a daughter of mine

The Three Weavers

should think such foolishness!

Hertha, shamed and abashed, stole away to weep, that she had incurred her father's scorn. But next day, when they played in the garden, Huberta said, 'Thy father is an old tyrant to forbid thee the use of Clotho's gift. He cannot love thee as mine does me, or he would not deny thee such a pleasure. Come! I will help thee to find it.'

So hand in hand they stole into an inner room

The Three Weavers

by a door that Herthold thought securely bolted, and there stood a loom like Huberta's, and over it a mirror in which the same shadows of the world were repeated in passing. And as Hertha picked up the shuttle to send the thread of a rosy day-dream through the warp of gold, the long-haired page in crimson clad passed down the street outside, and she saw his image in the mirror.

‘How like a prince he



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bears himself!' she murmured. 'My father is indeed a tyrant to deny me the pleasure of looking out upon the world and weaving sweet fancies about it. Henceforth I shall not obey him, but shall daily steal away in here, to weave in secret what he will not allow me to do openly.'

At the same time, Hildegarde stood before her father, saying, timidly, 'Is it true, my father, what Huberta says is written in the stars? To-day when

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I saw Huberta's loom I pushed back the bolt which has always barred the door leading into an inner room from mine, and there I found the loom of gold and a wonderful mirror. I fain would use them as Huberta does, but I have come to ask thee first, if all be well.'

A very tender smile lighted the face of old Hildgardmar. Taking the hand of the little Hildgarde in his, he led the way into the inner room.



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‘I have often looked forward to this day, my little one,’ he exclaimed, ‘although I did not think thou wouldst come quite so soon with thy questions. It is indeed true, what Huberta hast told thee is written in the stars. On the right weaving of this web depends the happiness of all thy future, and not only thine but of those who may come after thee.

‘Tis a dangerous gift the good Clotho left thee, for looking in that mirror



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thou wilt be tempted to weave thy web to fit the shifting figures that flit therein. But listen to thy father who hath never yet deceived thee, and who has only thy good at heart. Keep always by thyside this sterling yardstick which I give thee, for it marks the inches and the ells to which the stature of a prince must measure. Not until the web doth fully equal it can it be safely taken from the loom.

‘Thou art so young,



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'tis but a little mantle
thou couldst weave this
year, at best. Fit but to
clothe the shoulders of
yon curly shepherd lad.'
He pointed to the bright
reflection passing in the
mirror. 'But 'tis a magic
loom that lengthens with
thy growth, and each
year shall the web grow
longer, until at last, a
woman grown, thou
canst hold it up against
the yardstick, and find
that it doth measure
to the last inch and ell
the size demanded



The Three Weavers

by a prince's noble stature.

'But thou wilt oft be dazzled by the mirror's sights, and youths will come to thee, one by one, each begging, "Give me the royal mantle, Hildegarde. I am the prince the stars have destined for thee." And with honeyed words he'll show thee how the mantle in the loom is just the length to fit his shoulders. But let him not persuade thee to cut it loose and give it him, as thy young fingers

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will be fain to do. Weave on another year, and yet another, till thou, a woman grown, canst measure out a perfect web, more ample than these stripling youths could carry, but which will fit thy prince in faultlessness, as falcon's feathers fit the falcon.'

Hildegarde, awed by his solemn words of warning, took the silver yardstick and hung it by the mirror, and standing before old Hildgardmar with bowed head, said,



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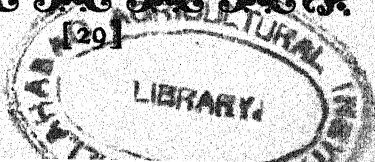
‘You may trust me, father; I will not cut the golden warp from out the loom until I, a woman grown, have woven such a web as thou thyself shalt say is worthy of a prince’s wearing.’

So Hildgardmar left her with his blessing, and went back to his work. After that the winter followed the autumn and the summer the spring many times, and the children played in the garden and learned their lessons of broidery and fair

The Three Weavers

needlework and songs upon the lute. And every day each stole away to the inner room, and threw the shuttle in and out among the threads of gold.

Hertha worked always in secret, peering ever in the mirror, lest perchance the long-haired page in crimson clad should slip by and she not see him. For the sheen of his fair hair dazzled her to all other sights, and his face was all she thought of by day and





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dreamed of by night, so that she often forgot to ply her needle or finger her lute. He was only a page, but she called him prince in her thoughts until she really believed him one. When she worked at the web she sang to herself, 'It is for him — for him!'

Huberta laughed openly about her web, and her father oft teased her about the one for whom it was intended, saying, when the village lads went by, 'Is that thy

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prince?' or, 'Is it for this one thou weavest?' But he never went with her into that inner room, so he never knew whether the weaving was done well or ill. And he never knew that she cut the web of one year's weaving and gave it to the curly shepherd lad. He wore it with jaunty grace at first, and Huberta spent long hours at the mirror, watching to see him pass by all wrapped within its folds. But it grew tarnished after awhile from



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his long tramps over the dirty moors after his flocks, and Huberta saw other figures in the mirror which pleased her fancy, and she began another web. And that she gave to a student in cap and gown, and the next to a troubadour strolling past her window, and the next to a knight in armour who rode by one idle summer day.

The years went by, she scattering her favours to whomsoever called her sweetheart with vows of



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devotion, and Hertha faithful to the page alone. Hildegarde worked on, true to her promise. But there came a time when a face shone across her mirror so noble and fair that she started back in a flutter.

‘Oh, surely, ’tis he,’ she whispered to her father. ‘His eyes are so blue they fill all my dreams.’ But old Hildgardmar answered her, ‘Does he measure up to the standard set by the sterling yardstick for a

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full-grown prince to be?’

‘No,’ she answered, sadly. ‘Only to the measure of an ordinary man. But see how perfectly the mantle I have woven would fit him!’

‘Nay, weave on, then,’ he said, kindly. ‘Thou hast not yet reached the best thou canst do. This is not the one written for thee in the stars.’

A long time after a knight flashed across the mirror blue. A knight like Sir Lancelot:

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“His broad clear brow in sunlight
glowed.

On burnished hooves his
war-horse trode.

From underneath his helmet
flowed

His coal-black curls, as on
he rode,

As he rode down to Camelot.”

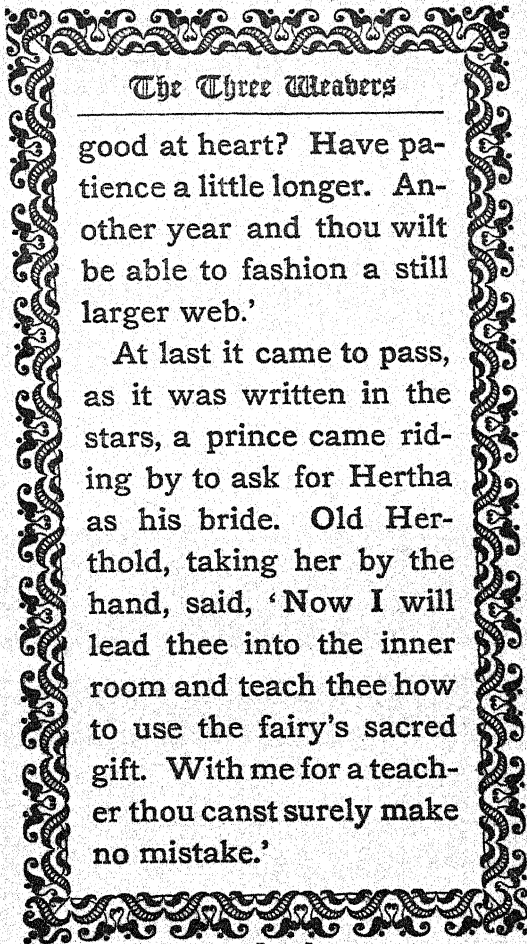
So noble he was that
she felt sure that he was
the one destined to wear
her mantle, and she went
to her father, saying, ‘He
has asked for the robe,
and measured by thy own
sterling yardstick, it
would fit him in fault-

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lessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon.'

Hildgardmar laid the yardstick against the web. 'Nay,' he said. 'This is only the size of a knight. It lacks a handbreadth yet of the measure of a prince.'

Hildegarde hesitated, half-pouting, till he said, beseechingly, 'I am an old man, knowing far more of the world and its ways than thou, my daughter. Have I ever deceived thee? Have I ever had aught but thy



The Three Weavers

good at heart? Have patience a little longer. Another year and thou wilt be able to fashion a still larger web.'

At last it came to pass, as it was written in the stars, a prince came riding by to ask for Hertha as his bride. Old Herthold, taking her by the hand, said, 'Now I will lead thee into the inner room and teach thee how to use the fairy's sacred gift. With me for a teacher thou canst surely make no mistake.'



The Three Weavers

When they came into the inner room there stood only the empty loom from which the golden warp had been clipped.

‘How now!’ he demanded, angrily. Hertha, braving his ill-humour, said, defiantly, ‘Thou art too late. Because I feared thy scorn of what thou wast pleased to call my childish foolishness, I wove in secret, and when my prince came by, long ago I gave it him. He stands outside at the casement.’



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The astonished Herthold, turning in a rage, saw the long-haired page clad in the mantle which she had woven in secret. He tore it angrily from the youth, and demanded she should give it to the prince, who waited to claim it, but the prince would have none of it. It was of too small a fashion to fit his royal shoulders, and had been defiled by the wearing of a common page. So with one look of disdain he rode away.

Stripped of the robe



The Three Weavers

her own fancy had woven around him, the page stood shorn before her. It was as if a veil had been torn from her eyes, and she no longer saw him as her fond dreams had painted him. She saw him in all his unworthiness; and the cloth of gold which was her maiden-love, and the rosy day-dreams she had woven into it to make the mantle of a high ideal, lay in tattered shreds at her feet. When she looked from the one to the other

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and saw the mistake she had made and the opportunity she had lost, she covered her face with her hands and cried out to Herthold, 'It is thy fault. Thou shouldst not have laughed my childish questions to scorn, and driven me to weave in ignorance and in secret.' But all her upbraiding was too late. As it was written in the stars, her heart broke, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.

That same day came

The Three Weavers

a prince, to Hubert, asking for his daughter. He called her from the garden, saying, gaily, 'Bring forth the mantle now, Huberta. Surely, it must be a goodly one after all these years of weaving at thy own sweet will.'

She brought it forth, but when he saw it he started back aghast at its pigmy size. When he demanded the reason, she confessed with tears that she had no more of the golden warp that was Clotho's sacred gift. She.



The Three Weathers

had squandered that maiden-love in the by-gone years to make the mantles she had so thoughtlessly bestowed upon the shepherd lad and the troubadour, the student and the knight. This was all she had left to give.

‘Well,’ said her father, at length, ‘’tis only what many another has done in the wanton foolishness of youth. But perchance when the prince sees how fair thou art, and how sweetly thou

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dost sing to thy lute, he may overlook the paltriness of thy offering. Take it to him.'

When she had laid it before him he cast only one glance at it, so small it was, so meagre of gold thread, so unmeet for a true prince's wearing. Then he looked sorrowfully into the depths of her beautiful eyes and turned away.

The gaze burned into her very soul and revealed to her all that she had lost for evermore. She

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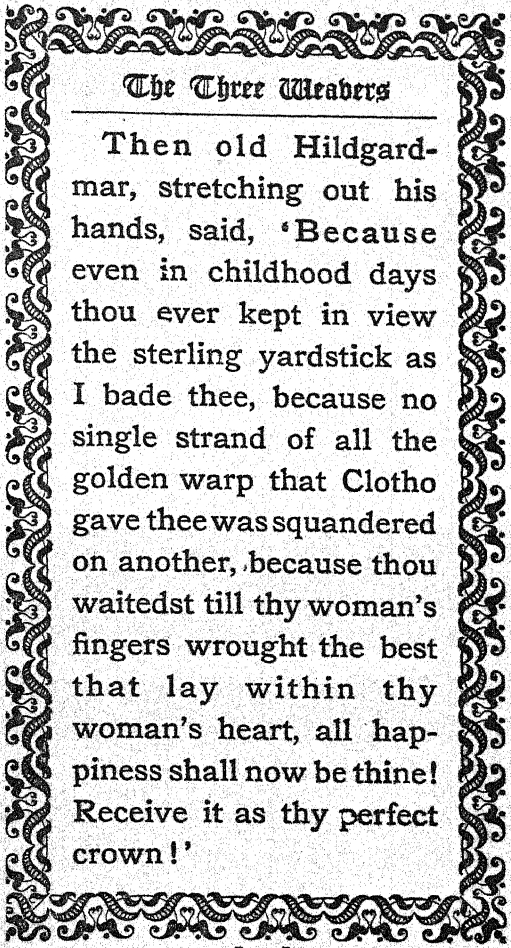
cried out to her father with pitiful sobs that set his heartstrings in a quiver, 'It is thy fault! Why didst thou not warn me what a precious gift was the gold warp Clotho gave me! Why didst thou say to me, "Is this the lad? Is that the lad?" till I looked only at the village churls and wove my web to fit their unworthy shoulders, and forgot how high is the stature of a perfect prince!' Then, hiding her face, she fled away,



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and as it was written in the stars, her heart broke, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.

Then came the prince to Hildegarde. All blushing and aflutter, she clipped the threads that held the golden web of her maiden-love, through which ran all her happy girlish day-dreams, and let him take it from her. Glancing shyly up, she saw that it fitted him in all faultlessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon.



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Then old Hildgard-mar, stretching out his hands, said, 'Because even in childhood days thou ever kept in view the sterling yardstick as I bade thee, because no single strand of all the golden warp that Clotho gave thee was squandered on another, because thou waitedst till thy woman's fingers wrought the best that lay within thy woman's heart, all happiness shall now be thine! Receive it as thy perfect crown!'



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So with her father's blessing light upon her, she rode away beside the prince; and ever after, all her life was crowned with happiness as it had been written for her in the stars.

THE END

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